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ABSTRACT

Social, political, moral, and economic conditions of the community have an impact on the material taught and on how it is taught. Consequently, the teacher regulates his actions to conform to community norms. Since the migrant is a transient, marginally related to the community in which he works, it is often difficult for the community members to understand the necessity of providing education, health care, and other services for him. Therefore, this responsibility should rest within an agency authorized to deal with Federal and out-of-state agencies and to establish minimum standards of education for all migrant children. This center should provide the information and coordination necessary to develop specific migrant education programs and to train teachers to implement them. It should obtain data from private and governmental agencies concerning crew composition, migration, kinship, cultural factors, and point of origin facilities. This information should then be transmitted to local programs providing summer education in the form of suggestions for methodology and subject matter. Special classroom material specially designed for the type of crews in the program should also be included. Thus, the center would relieve community pressures by accepting responsibility for programs which the local areas may not be able to obtain or justify to its residents. (NQ)

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THE COMMUNITY, THE TEACHER AND THE MIGRANT CHILD

by

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THE COMMUNITY, THE TEACHER AND THE MIGRANT CHILD*

William H. Friedland

The original intent of the research was to examine the relationship of the teacher to the community to determine its effects on the relationship between teachers and migrant children. As it became impossible to conduct empirical field studies because of shortages of personnel and time, this report was developed from empirical data already collected through three years of study of the Cornell Migrant Labor Project.

The problems encountered in the education of migrant children stem from a basic failure to identify goals so that meaningful programs can be constructed for their attainment.

At present most teachers respond to migrant children in the normal teaching posture thereby reflecting community views and expectations with respect to education; thus, the migrant child is expected to exhibit middle class norms and practices. The child in most cases is unable to respond to teaching based on such expectations and defines the classroom situation as irrelevant and hostile. The frustration he feels is felt by the teacher, who realized that he is failing to reach the migrant child. Thus, we have found one of two situations in most classrooms of migrant children that have been studied: either a frustrated teacher trying to impose middle-class discipline on equally frustrated migrant children or a class in which the teacher has given up trying to teach, and the resulting "play periods" meet few discernable educational goals.

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Goals

The fundamental goal of an education program for migrant children should be to provide social and technical skills permitting social and occupational mobility. In order that this goal may be met, it is necessary that the teacher understand his role as intercultural communicator. Such a role requires a conceptual understanding of normative systems and specific knowledge of migrant culture. Although teachers are presently given information about migrant culture and admonished to respect the differences found among different groups of people, they do not understand why the differences in norms exist and that normative behavior inappropriate to middle-class American life is quite functional in the migrant camps where children spend most of their lives. For example in the camp, education has no significance either in terms of prestige or economic success. Similarly, planning for the future or depending on long term rewards which never come is negatively reinforced.

Teaching skills for social and economic mobility involves empathizing with the migrant culture from which the child comes and in which he must live so that a program relevant to the child, to which he can adapt, can be constructed. The purpose of the teacher's adopti.., a more relevant posture to migrant children is neither to make alien norms more palatable nor to entrench children in the norms of the camp. The child himself must come to understand enough about the concept of normative behavior to realize that he is being asked to internalize norms useful in school and in the future but invalid in the camp situation. It is necessary that the migrant child be made cognizant of the attitudes and expectations of a controlling white society if he is to achieve mobility in it or around it. The teacher has not only to relate social and technical skills to the migrant child, but to orient the child to the learning experience and the learning experience to

the child in such a way that the culture shock does not make learning impossible.

Structural Inadequacies of Present Programs

It is obviously difficult for teachers to forsake normal teaching roles which are successful during the regular school year for experimental ones relevant to the needs of migrant children. Many teachers working in migrant programs get involved primarily for the extra income that summer work brings. Such teachers are even less likely to accept experimental teaching methods. Those teachers who work in migrant programs for moral or philosophical reasons, and who have no opposition toward experimental methods *per se*, however, are limited in their adaptability by structural constraints.

For the most part, areas in which migrant workers are found are those with a high degree of rural, non-industrial population. Town or village residents are involved in agriculture or agricultural-related industries. In such communities, farmers are of special interest since they provide its economic base. Furthermore, and especially in upstate areas, there is an absence of minority group residents in "good standing." Those migrants who have dropped out and taken up residence in or on the periphery of the community are usually in the lowest income group, are often not economically self-sufficient, and are known derogatorily as "stagrants." This does not mean necessarily that there is a racial bias, although in most communities this is the case, but that the interests of minority groups are hardly preeminent to the community; indeed, such interests are invariably insignificant unless the community is experiencing "troubles" with an ethnic minority.

The actions of a community's school board will reflect these circumstances. Social, political, moral, and economic conditions of the area have a heavy impact not only on the material taught, but on how it is taught.

The teacher's relationship to the community is small enough (and most communities with migrants are quite small), the informal involvements of the educator become criteria for judging the formal task of teaching. As a consequence, the teacher must regulate his actions to conform to community norms. While perfectly reasonable, this proves deleterious since the normative framework of most such communities inhibits positive action in the field of migrant education.

Most formal migrant education programs operate functionally as day-care centers which take care of and attempt to further the education of migrant children from the ages of six months through twelve years. Teachers in such programs in New York State operate in a short-term position. By the time the needs of the child are recognized, it is often too late to change the nature and scope of the exisitng programs. This is complicated by the fact that the community may not recognize or understand the need for a program substantially divergent from that conducted for nine months out of the year. Pressures from farm interests may squelch an innovative program emphasizing training to allow migrants to leave the stream and seek employment in an industrial complex. These factors combined with a need for experimental teaching methods and devices which suggest increased educational costs supplied by the community (either directly or more usually indirectly through state aid) for non-residents, hamper the effectiveness of migrant education programs. Outside costs to affect structural differences in an educational program in which the children of the community will not participate often meet with local resentment.

The socially concerned teacher who attempts to create a stimulating atmosphere for children unreceptive to academic training as a result of past bad experiences and present living patterns are likely to raise questions of

misplaced allegiance and preferential treatment in the minds of some members of the community. There are others in the community who will equate programs directed toward the migrant as a threat to the system--a system on which a great deal of the economic life of the community is based. This is particularly true of education programs aimed at helping migrant children be upwardly mobile, out of the migrant stream.

A Possible Solution: A Migrant Education Center

Because the migrant is a transient, marginally related to the community in which he works, it is often difficult for members of the community to understand the necessity to provide education, health care, and other services for the migrant. It then becomes necessary for outside agencies to fund, coordinate and supply a coherent system of education and other social services for migrants. This responsibility should rest within an agency with the authority to deal with federal and out-of-state agencies and establish minimum standards of education for all migrant children in New York State. Such an agency should also have the advantage of not being tied to existing local educational establishments so that innovative programs uniquely suited to the needs of migrants could be more easily designed and implemented. Teachers implementing such programs similarly should be under fewer local constraints.

Furthermore, such a center for migrant education should provide the information and coordination necessary to develop specific migrant education programs and to train teachers to implement them. It should obtain data from private and governmental agencies concerning crew composition, migration, kinship, cultural factors, and point of origin facilities. This should be transmitted to local programs providing summer education in the form of suggestions for methodology and subject matter. Included with these materials

should be special classroom material specifically designed for the type of crews the programs will be teaching. In so doing, the center would relieve community pressures by accepting responsibility for programs which the local areas may not be able to obtain or justify to its residents. As the crews migrate within the state, the children could be assured a continuous pattern of education during the summer.

Organizing Data For The Center

A prime responsibility of such a migrant education center would be to gather data on migration, kinship and cultural patterns relevant to the creation of education programs.

1. Migration Patterns

Seasonal workers in New York State originate from in Florida, Puerto Rico, Alabama, etc. Each crew operates as a unit and tends to identify heavily not only with ethnic background, but also with specific point of origin (e.g., Belle Glade, Pahokee). Because of this, members of a crew from Clearwater, Florida, do not relate themselves significantly to a crew from Pahokee and indeed, may exhibit hostility or rivalry toward such a crew. Such antagonism is even more explicit between crews of different ethnicity.

State agencies dealing with the placement of seasonal labor can provide information to a migrant education center regarding crews origins, areas in which they will work, and composition of crews (families, singles, etc.). The migrant education center could then provide local centers with programs and methods for education specific categories of seasonal workers. For example: a crew from Belle Glade is scheduled to reach West Winfield on the first of August. The center could provide materials specifically designed

to relate to Florida Negroes. Such materials would include suggested areas of concentration based on the educational programs already in effect at the point of origin. In this manner, the host program could not only provide continuity for what has already been taught but also fill in the gaps between the two school systems more effectively. Thus, the short northern exposure could be more fruitful since teaching staffs would have an opportunity to prepare in advance.

2. Kinship and Cultural Patterns

A coordinating center for migrant education would have the advantage of central information supply. This information is especially necessary in dealing with seasonal workers since kinship and cultural patterns differ significantly from those encountered in the regular teaching situations. Teachers made aware of such differences can be trained to teach from an anthropological approach rather than using usual methods.

Kinship. The migrant child may or may not be with his parents during the season. Often, he is the responsibility of aunts, cousins, friends of the family or others, although the child may refer to such persons as "mother" or "father". The child's parents may be working elsewhere and the separation temporary in nature or, it may be permanent with the child having knowledge of his parent's existance. The reasons for separation and the varying combinations possible suggest that the teacher would be seriously mistaken in the assumption that he can approach family relationships in the same manner used during the regular academic year.

Culture. The differing family structures imply a different set of family duties. A child may cook for himself and his siblings. Tasks in the family which are fairly well defined in white society are alloted quite differently in the migrant family unit. Cooking, laundry, care of other children, earning of income, etc., are often the responsibility of the children themselves

or, as in the case of more sophisticated tasks, the responsibility of older women in the camp not necessarily living with the children. (This situation can be illustrated by a camp in west central New York. In this camp a pregnant woman took care of the smaller children on non-school work days although she was unrelated to most of them. Furthermore, an old woman in this camp often did the laundry of a cousin related by marriage though she was not a member of the family which generally functioned as a distinct unit.)

Because the privations of the migrant system confront the migrant with problems of basic survival, the migrant's failure to respond to middle class norms, though frustrating to teachers, is understandable within the migrant framework. Why should the child become imbued with a desire for education when it has not paid off in the past for his older siblings or relatives and does not relate to him now? Simple mistakes resulting from a lack of knowledge of the migrant system may spell the difference between success and failure in reaching the child. By the time the child is eight or nine years old he is not only able to handle responsibility uncommon to his age group outside of the migrant labor situation, but also considers himself able to take care of himself. Although in the strictest sense the child is not self-sufficient, teachers should realize that self-confidence is a powerful concept which can be used to advantage in a teaching situation.

Parents or guardians of the child reinforce self-confidence to pressure the child to fulfill certain responsibilities. It is possible, however, that parents may negatively sanction self-confidence in the school context which they feel threatens the economic or structural security of the family unit. As a necessary result of close quarters and lack of facilities there is some interaction between family units in the crew. For the most part, however, such units tend to act in a discrete manner. In one case, in the camp discussed before, a mother told a social worker that her sister was in the same

camp and could look after her children when she took her daughter to the hospital, even though she did not know where her sister was living in the camp and did not know her sister's married name. This type of anomie, even among families, is the single characteristic most commonly found in migrant situations. For a child to break with his unit would not only leave him alone, but also deprive the unit of certain benefits which could not be easily compensated. On a different level, parents may not reward confidence in school success in hopes of protecting the child from future failure.

Logically the anomie of camp life creates fear. When a person or group perceives itself to be alone, then all outside influences become a threat to one's ability to survive. One can only concern oneself with the social and moral attitudes of society as a whole once a certain amount of security and trust has been achieved. The concept of fairness of treatment can only operate when a person is sure that others with whom he lives will accept such a norm. But a migrant cannot operate under a code of reciprocity or trust since everyone, even the persons in his camp, is liable to take advantage of him. The ability to take advantage of someone else means having a little more, and to a migrant, that difference can be critical. Thus, the reaction is to mistrust nearly everyone. Because of this, the migrant appears to the outsider to be asocial, amoral and arbitrary; these manifestations are necessary, however, for survival.

When a person lacks control over his environment there are two methods of compensating for it. First, control can be fictionalized; second, protective mechanisms are created. Migrants do both. In the camps there is a fairly pervasive feeling that the elements of nature, illness, etc., can be controlled by magic. Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islanders deals with such magic. When the natives fished in the lagoon which had a fairly

well protected supply of sea life, magic was not used. However, when they fished in the open sea, facing the dangers of the weather and on unsure prospects of a good catch, a complicated ritual was performed. Such actions were indicative of the amount of control that the natives had over their situation. The migrant situation is similar. The manifestations of nature such as illness or rain affect the ability of the migrant to survive. Since proper medical treatment is unfamiliar, magic is the first most probable recourse. The same is true of rain, the condition of the crop--with the added factor that no one can control them. Hence, in situations directly related to the survival of the migrant, but which cannot be controlled by him, magic is invoked. Whether this is a valid approach to life is not really germane. It is a way of having psychological control therefore, a teacher must be sensitive to the myths which are exploded.

The kinship and cultural patterns described above are those common to black migrants. Different patterns are exhibited by Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, and others.

One experience common to <u>all</u> migrants is a lack of continuity and predictability. An effective migrant education program must provide a measure of predictability to demonstrate its usefulness to the child. This can be done only if there is a firm understanding of conditions in the migrant culture--a few of the most striking of which have been discussed here.

<u>The Anthropological Approach</u>

Once data has been collected on migration, kinship and culture, this can be translated in terms of its impact on teaching methods. First, the center must demonstrate why such factors are important considerations for each teacher.

1. Limited Experiences of Migrants

Knowledge of migrant attachment to ethnicity and point of origin effects the classroom in several ways. A failure to recognize crew individuality as manifested, for example, in careless grouping of Puerto Ricans and Negroes can create tensions in the school and mistrust for the teacher. However, a teacher can use this to advantage by recognizing it and organizing teaching material in accordance to it. In this manner, the child will be able to identify with the form of the subject matter being taught. A resourceful teacher will encourage pupils to explain subjects important to them, and then integrate familiar words, phrases and events into teaching matter.

2. Kinship

Since kinship relationships vary within the crews, the teacher can use this fact to demonstrate to the children that people live differently from one another. This is a valuable experience for the child since he may realize that other children can be friends although they are different in some way. This may help to reduce fear of the new or the unknown.

3. Attitudes Towards Education

A teacher who understands that education has been an insignificant advantage for the migrant in the past will realize that the idea of education must be "sold" to the child. Even while young migrant children know it is unprofitable to make a long term investment, either of money or of themselves, because their mode of living does not pay off in the long run, it is therefore necessary for the teacher to provide small, short-term awards and psychological rewards at fairly frequent intervals. These can have several favorable effects. First, they help to provide further predictability by creating a pattern of learning--task, accomplishment, reward. Second, they provide tangible evidence of the value of education--there is

something to be gotten from it. Finally, rewards keep interest from waning.

Arguments that this creates "rice Christians" or that "learning should be done for its own sake" are not very relevant. Such arguments may be valid for children who have some initial motivation, family and cultural support and an historic basis for the attitude that education is normally a rewarding experience of life itself. But this is not true for the migrant child. If the migrant child is to be educated, it must be demonstrated to him that he can get something tangible out of having an education. It has been a long established policy of plants employing unskilled workers to provide step increases at frequent, well-defined intervals. The migrant child does not have the opportunity or the leisure to appreciate learning for the sake of learning. It got his parents nothing and will get him nothing as far as he is concerned because the "white man runs it at the top and he's always goin' to run it" (as has been stated by many migrants in the camps we have studied).

4. Anomie and Fear

Fear of failure is perhaps the greatest barrier to teaching migrant children. This too can be turned to advantage if the teacher is willing to use an anthropological approach. Migrants have very little control over their lives and even less concerning education since they can guarantee themselves neither a good nor a meaningful education. At this point, the teacher becomes a major determinant. By easing the teacher-pupil relationship and learning from the children as to who and what they think they are and what they think they are capable of, the children gain a sense of control. The child should not perceive himself to be at the mercy of the teacher's decisions; he must see himself as having a meaningful role of his own in the classroom. This approach must be in constant use and not re-

served for specific time intervals. This will allow for reinforcement of predictability and self-confidence, and by itself will act as a strong reinforcement of learning. Only in such a classroom can the teacher hope to demonstrate that his is not a hostile or punitive role.

Suggested Projects for the Classroom Teacher

The teacher must be prepared to give a great deal of attention to each child while granting him responsibility--and therefore control over--the learning situation. This can be accomplished by many methods, a few are suggested below.

Tape Recorders. Migrant children live in a verbal subculture as opposed to a literate one. Very early in their development, children are able to rap (speak, converse) at length on sports, cars, clothes, Motown music stars, and many other subjects. The educational challenge involved is not the content of the reading material, rather, it is getting the children interested in the material. Subjects which are of interest, no matter how shallow we deem them, can be a great stimulus to read for the migrant child. Simplified stories about the life of James Brown, what he wears, what he sings, would be a fruitful inducement. Perhaps the best way for the teacher to get such information would be to give the child an assignment to tell the class who James Brown is, and then have the child tape it. This would have two functions. First, it would be a new experience in communication that would be fun, while, at the same time, increasing manual and mechanical skills. Second, it would be a way of giving a measure of prestige (short-term payoff) for the child when the tape is played in the class. At that time the class could criticize delivery, speech, and grammar problems. This critical aspect of the project would not outweigh the positive aspects since migrant children (and parents)

tend to be quite critical. At this juncture, the children would be involved in the teaching function, and the criticism would not be coming only from a white source. They would be able to assume some amount of control over their environment while at the same time, adding a measure of predictability. The tapes would be transcribed, reproduced and formed into a reading booklet and used as a reading aid which the child could eventually keep. Most important, throughout such a process, the children can be importing information to their teacher. This can be a critical motivating device when the child discovers that he has knowledge deemed important by a prestigeful person - the teacher.

Large Print Typewriters. Such additions to the teaching material of the school would enable the teacher to teach reading, spelling, grammar and mechanical skills in a way calculated to improve the motivation of migrant children. A child could take a story which he has created and through any method available to him (e.g. The James Brown story), hunt and peck or otherwise create a booklet of a few pages containing material not only relevant by content, but by creation. A more firm understanding and appreciation for books would result. Were the child to add illustrations, sew the book, etc., he could keep it to take with him thereby spreading his education to his environment.

Situational Problems. The migrant child has a difficult time discovering the relative worth of items. Math could be used to illustrate nutritional concepts as in the following problem. If cupcakes are 10¢, milk 15¢ and a candy bar 10¢, how much can be saved by buying a school lunch which has milk, meat, vegetable, and dessert for 25¢ instead of bringing a cupcake, milk and a candy bar? A teacher has to be inventive and go beyond the normal scope of problems to find those meaningful in the migrant context.

Manual Skills and Creative Problem Solving. The ability to cope with and master simple functional skills such as putting up a basketball hoop, is limited in the migrant situation. Often migrants choose an inadequate or inefficient method for completing tasks because their life style does not require better adaptation. As a result, migrants have a difficult time coping with mechanical devices of even the simplest nature. Thus, shop, woodworking, sewing and other creative classes which show how work can be simplified would be of aid. Such classes would also provide for the child assuming a certain amount of responsibility for a creation which will be his to keep when the project is completed.

Home Remedy Health Programs. The problem involved here is that basic levels of sanitation are not always available to the migrant. As a result, certain methods of handling disease are not applicable to his situation. A health program has to start with the very rudiments of care before going to more sophisticated phases. Children have to be taught how to avoid and care for impetigo, ringworm, intestinal worms, fleas, even if all they can do for the present is to wash well with whatever soap available, make sure that dishes are clean, put powder on affected areas, etc. One must realize that optimal care is not always available even if there are clinics since parents are suspicious of them or are unable to get to them. Since children often care for brothers and sisters, it would be wise to warn them about feeding children who have diarrhea, are vomiting; how to bathe and change a baby and to perform minor first aid. They should be taught whenever possible, how to use common remedies such as hot water for soaking infection, the use of table salt, bicarbonate of soda, mustard plasters and the like.

Camp and Field Visits. The teacher should be available for visiting the camps, meeting the people and discovering the nature of the camp to be better able to understand what children are talking about, and to develop examples for use in the classroom situation. If some of the children in the camp can act as guides, the will be given the feeling of control. On their home territory migrants are generally quite hospitable; they would be pleased to have teachers visit them, though they will often apologize for their circumstances. The value of such visits cannot be counted in monetary or time units. The knowledge that someone cares, an interest divorced from paternalism or exploitatative motives can make all the difference in the success or failure of a program.